

Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park

Draft Management Plan



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1. Introduction

The *Provincial Parks Act* (1993) requires that a management plan be prepared for each provincial park. Management plans establish long-term direction for parks and address issues pertaining to resource protection, use and development of park land. The process of preparing this draft management plan and coordinating the public involvement process is the responsibility of a team involving staff from Parks and Natural Areas Branch, regional staff of Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship and a consultant contracted to work on the project.

The Treaty and Aboriginal rights of Aboriginal peoples to pursue traditional uses and activities within Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park are acknowledged and respected within the context of this draft management plan.

2. Park History

Archaeological evidence indicates that the area around Whitemouth Falls, where the Whitemouth River flows into the Winnipeg River, was used as a camping spot as long as 4,800 years ago. Use of the area has continued through more recent times. The Seven Sisters Generating Station, located on the Winnipeg River, south-east of Whitemouth Falls, began operating in 1931. At that time Whitemouth Falls, which offers an excellent view of the Seven Sisters dam, became particularly popular as a recreation spot (Penziwol & Blahut, 2011). The area immediately in the vicinity of Whitemouth Falls was designated as Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park in 1974. It was one of several parks established that year. Aside from day-use recreation, much of the park area was also used for Hydro purposes.

In 2007, following discussions between the R.M. of Whitemouth, Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Conservation, and after public review, the park was expanded to include an area on the north side of the Winnipeg River. This change in the park boundary removed 121 hectares of land with low ecological value on the south side of the Winnipeg River that is used for Hydro and municipal purposes, including transmission lines, drainage works and access to the Seven Sisters Generating Station and townsite. At the same time, 430 hectares of open tamarack forest north of the river were added to the park. The addition of this land enabled conservation of a significant area of great gray owl habitat.

3. Park Attributes

Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park is 483.34 hectares (4.83 square kilometres) in size. It is located less than one kilometre from the community of Seven Sisters Falls and approximately 90 kilometres north-east of the city of Winnipeg. The Winnipeg River serves to divide the park into two distinct areas. The portion of the park that is south of the Winnipeg River is further divided into two parcels of land by the Whitemouth River and Whitemouth Falls, and functions as a day-use recreation area. The portion of the park located north of the Winnipeg River is primarily intended to protect great gray owl habitat.

3.1 Natural

Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park is situated in the Lake of the Woods portion of the Manitoba Lowlands Natural Region. The focal point of the park is Whitemouth Falls, where the Whitemouth River flows into the Winnipeg River. The day-use area at this site consists mostly of open space sprinkled with oak trees. Nearby forests contain mixed vegetation, with typical tree species including ash, jack pine, trembling aspen, white birch, balsam fir, white spruce and balsam poplar (Smith et al., 1998). The area of the park that is north of the Winnipeg River consists mainly of open tamarack forest and black spruce bog. This area also contains a stand of black ash, which is unusual in Manitoba. In addition, the narrow-leaved false foxglove, a plant that is uncommon in Manitoba, has been found in the park (Manitoba Conservation Data Centre, 2012).

A variety of wildlife is present in and around the park. The mix of ecosystems in the area causes it to be frequented by a variety of bird species. Large numbers of white pelicans frequent the rocks and water in the area around the falls. The Whitemouth River contains many fish species, including walleye, northern pike, sauger, rock bass, yellow perch, whitefish, catfish and mooneye. Lake sturgeon, which has been assessed as Endangered by the

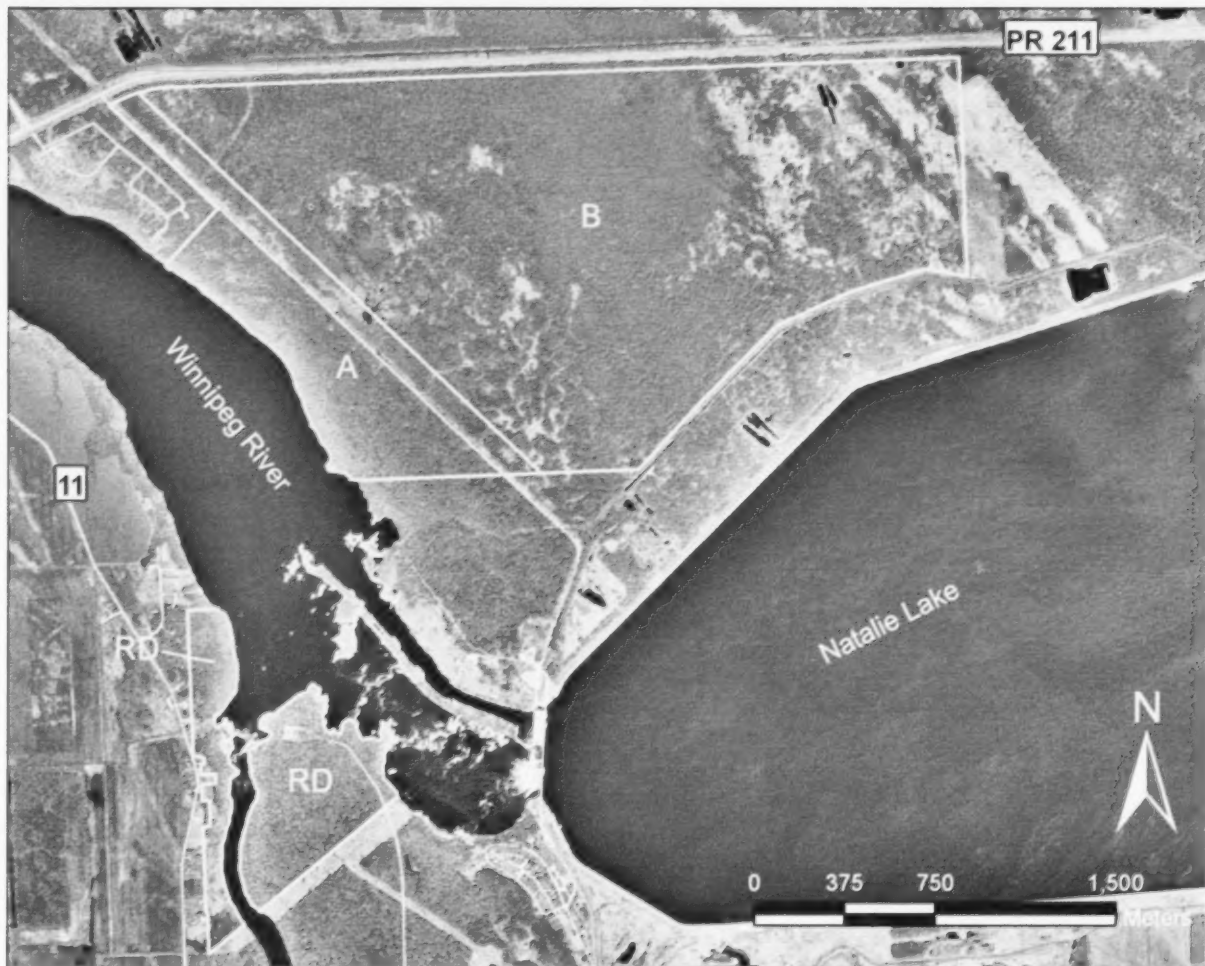
Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), can be found in the Winnipeg River below Whitemouth Falls (Species at Risk Public Registry, 2011). The Whitemouth River watershed also provides habitat for two fish species at risk in Manitoba – the carmine shiner, listed as Threatened under Canada's Species at Risk Act (2002) (SARA), and the northern brook lamprey, listed as a species of Special Concern under SARA (Species at Risk Public Registry, 2011). Wooded areas in the vicinity of the park serve as habitat for wildlife such as white-tailed deer, black bear, ruffed grouse and other birds and small mammals (Smith et al., 1998). Waterfowl frequent wetland areas in the region.

The tamarack forest and black spruce bog located north of the Winnipeg River provide important habitat for the great gray owl, Manitoba's provincial bird. This site is a provincially significant staging and nesting area for the owl. It is the first area in Manitoba designated specifically to conserve, manage and maintain great gray owl habitat.

3.2 Recreational

The portion of the park located in the area immediately surrounding Whitemouth Falls is intended for recreational development and day-use activities. Here, visitors can expect a highly modified site and frequent opportunities to interact with other park visitors. This area of the park is popular for picnicking, cross-country skiing and fishing at the falls. The large number of shorebird and waterfowl species in the area, combined with the road accessibility of the site, makes the park particularly popular for birdwatching. The day-use area also provides a scenic view of the rivers and the nearby Seven Sisters dam. Common catches for anglers are whitefish, which run at the bottom of the falls in the spring and spawn in the fall, and northern pike, which can be caught year-round. Facilities in this area of the park include a picnic area with fire pits, non-modern washrooms and the Seven Sisters cross-country ski trail. In 2006, the R.M. of Whitemouth's Seven Sisters Ski Trail was expanded

Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park Map



to include a seven kilometre loop that runs through Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park and past the Seven Sisters dam. The trailhead is located south of the park off Provincial Road 307. The park is an important recreation area for residents of Seven Sisters and the surrounding areas.

The portion of the park located north of the Winnipeg River does not contain facilities, other than those related to Manitoba Hydro's access requirements for the Seven Sisters dam site and transmission lines. Visitors to this part of the park can expect few site modifications and a low likelihood of encountering other visitors. Nature-based recreation is allowed in

this backcountry area. This part of the park is also popular with birdwatchers, especially in winter when the chances of spotting a great gray owl are greatest.

3.3 Cultural

The area adjacent to Whitemouth Falls contains three known archaeological sites of significance. First Nations artifacts have been found at these sites, which research indicates were used as campsites and visited as long as 4,800 years ago.

3.4 Additional Features

A small portion of land in the park along the south shore of the Winnipeg River is within a Hydro Water Power Licence Area. This limits activities and development in that area to those which are considered to be compatible with risks associated with flooding and erosion. This land is currently owned by Manitoba Hydro but a process to transfer land ownership to the Crown is underway.

4. Park Management Framework

4.1 Classification

Manitoba's Provincial Park System is made up of almost 100 different parks and park reserves. Each of these areas plays a role in conserving ecosystems, preserving natural, cultural or heritage resources, and providing outdoor recreation or educational experiences. Classification descriptions can be found in Appendix A.

Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park is classified as a Recreation Park. The main purpose of a recreation park, as defined in *The Provincial Parks Act* (1993), is to provide recreational opportunities.

4.2 Park Purpose

Manitoba's provincial park system was established to conserve ecosystems and maintain biodiversity, to preserve unique and representative natural, cultural and heritage resources, and to provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities in a natural setting. Within this larger framework, individual parks contribute towards the overall objective of the provincial park system.

A System Plan for Manitoba's Provincial Parks

(1997) identifies the purpose of Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park as being to protect areas surrounding Whitemouth Falls and an area representative of treed black spruce bog while providing outdoor recreational opportunities and experiences in a natural setting. According to that plan, the park will:

- provide picnicking and day-use opportunities;
- provide river access for fishing and water-based recreational activities; and
- protect treed black spruce bog as great gray owl habitat.

4.3 Land Use Categories

Land Use Categories (LUCs) identify the important attributes of broad areas within a provincial park. Land may be categorized as Wilderness, Backcountry, Resource Use, Recreational Development, Heritage or Access LUCs. LUC descriptions can be found in Appendix A.

The land comprising Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park is categorized in several different LUCs. 10.8 percent (52.35 hectares) of the park is classified under the Recreational Development (RD) LUC, and accommodates recreational development. 73.6 percent (355.92 hectares) of the park is classified under the Backcountry LUC (B). This categorization ensures that this portion of the park will remain largely undisturbed, and allows for nature-oriented recreation. The remaining 15.6 percent (75.07 hectares) is classified under the Access LUC (A). The main purpose of this categorization is to accommodate Manitoba Hydro access to the Seven Sisters dam site and transmission lines in the area.

5. Park Management Guidelines

The following guidelines will direct park management actions in Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park.

5.1 Natural Values

1. The day-use portion of the park will be maintained as a natural-looking area that is characteristic of the surrounding landscape.
2. Ecological values in undeveloped portions of the park will be maintained and these areas will remain free of development other than that necessary to meet safety or operational needs.
3. Appropriate management techniques will be employed to help maintain the suitability of the park as part of the great gray owl habitat in Manitoba.
4. Negative impacts on known species of conservation concern, such as narrow-leaved false foxglove, will be minimized or avoided.

5.2 Recreation

1. Basic facilities for day-use activities will be provided.
2. Pedestrian access to the Winnipeg River and Whitemouth River will be provided from the day-use area on the east side of the Whitemouth River.
3. Opportunities to provide interpretive information in the park, such as on-site signs that reflect park values, will be investigated.
4. Manitoba will work with the R.M. of Whitemouth, local associations and other partners on projects consistent with the park purpose.
5. No docks or shoreline infrastructure will be permitted or provided.

5.3 Cultural and Heritage Values

1. Disturbance of culturally and/or archaeologically significant sites in the park will be avoided.
2. Where loss of or damage to archaeological values due to natural causes is unavoidable, artefacts will be documented and salvaged wherever possible.
3. Information on specific archaeological sites will not be made available to the public if there is a significant risk that increased access or visitation could pose a threat to the sites.

6. Implementation

This management plan will be reviewed in 10 to 15 years, or as may be required. The management plan is to be used in conjunction with park regulations, directives and other departmental and government policies.

Appendix A

Park Classification and Land Use Categories

Park Classifications

In accordance of section 7(2) of *The Provincial Parks Act* (1993), all provincial parks are classified as one of the following types:

- (a) a wilderness park, if the main purpose of the designation is to preserve representative areas of a natural region;
- (b) a natural park, if the main purpose of the designation is both to preserve areas of a natural region and to accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses;
- (c) a recreation park, if the main purpose of the designation is to provide recreational opportunities;
- (d) a heritage park, if the main purpose of the designation is to preserve an area of land containing a resource or resources of cultural or heritage value;
- (e) any other type of provincial park that may be specified in the regulation.

Land Use Categories

In accordance with section 7(3) of *The Provincial Parks Act* (1993), all provincial parks are categorized into one or more of the following land use categories:

- (a) a wilderness category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to protect representative or unique natural landscapes in an undisturbed state and provide recreational opportunities that depend on a pristine environment;
- (b) a backcountry category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to protect examples of natural landscapes and provide basic facilities and trails for nature-oriented recreation in a largely undisturbed environment;
- (c) a resource management category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to permit commercial resource development or extraction in a manner that does not compromise the main purpose of the park classification;
- (d) a recreational development category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to accommodate recreational development;
- (e) a heritage category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to protect a unique or representative site containing a resource or resources of cultural or heritage value;
- (f) an access category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to provide a point or route of access in a provincial park or a location for a lodge and associated facilities;
- (g) any other category that may be specified in the regulation.

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